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Renowned Photographers' Views of Cleveland in New Exhibition at Cleveland Museum of Art

“Almost since its beginnings, photography has attempted to describe cities I am not aware, however, of any such attempt ... so open-minded — so philosophically generous — as that pursued during the past dozen years by The George Gund Foundation.”

— Photography historian John Szarkowski

CLEVELAND (Oct. 11, 2002) — **A City Seen: Photographs from The George Gund Foundation Collection**, a new exhibition featuring works from some of our time's best and brightest artists, will open at the Cleveland Museum of Art Nov. 17, remaining on view through Jan. 26, 2003. Admission to the museum and this exhibition is free.

Since 1990, The George Gund Foundation has commissioned these fine art photographers to create compelling and evocative portfolios to reflect the Foundation's areas of philanthropic interest in Northeast Ohio and to illustrate its annual reports. In addition to being an inspired change of pace from grip-and-grin fare typical of annual report illustrations, this venture is one of only a few commissions that support fine art photographers. In celebration of the Foundation's 50th anniversary, the collection will be given to the museum following the exhibition.

The 12 artists represented in **A City Seen** will be Michael Book, Lois Conner, Judith Joy Ross, Dawoud Bey, Linda Butler, Lee Friedlander, Gregory Conniff, Frank Gohlke, Larry Fink, Douglas Lucak, Nicholas Nixon and Barbara Bosworth.

Their 148 black-and-white photographs, plus a selection of the Foundation's annual reports to be included in the exhibition, will explore Cleveland neighborhoods, the Cuyahoga River, Lake Erie, the children of Cleveland's public schools, patients at the Cleveland Free Clinic and the world of work in the city.

This exhibition and the related book featuring an essay by acclaimed photo historian John Szarkowski celebrate the Foundation's 50th anniversary.

The first artist to take part in the project was Michael Book (1990), whose depictions of Cleveland neighborhoods, omitting human figures, have a quiet, meditative quality. Lois Conner (1991) focused on the presence of urban, industrial and rural elements along the Cuyahoga River, while Judith Joy Ross (1992) celebrated the students of Cleveland's public schools. Focusing on Cleveland families, Dawoud Bey (1993) employed his innovative method of combining multiple images, revealing the changing moods and reactions of his subjects as each picture-making session progressed. Linda Butler (1994) offered a loving portrayal of interiors of Cleveland's

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arts institutions, including Severance Hall, the State Theatre at Playhouse Square and the Western Reserve Historical Society. Lee Friedlander (1995) featured Cleveland's workers in his photographs, including employees at LTV Steel, Orlando Baking Company, NASA Lewis Research Center and Lincoln Electric. In Gregory Conniff's images of urban gardens (1996), a curbside garden brims with vegetables and a patch of sunflowers appears as sturdy as the warehouses that surround it. Frank Gohlke's (1997) views of Lake Erie and the land adjoining it portray the immense body of water's mystery, functional nature and unpredictability. Larry Fink (1998) featured students at the Cleveland School of the Arts, including images of dancers, musicians and classes in session. Douglas Lucak (1999) used a pinhole camera to make his luminous photographs of the city's urban landscape. Free Clinic patients, often suffering and fatigued, were Nicholas Nixon's subjects (2000). Barbara Bosworth's (2001) images of the Metroparks System lovingly depict its paths, streams and woods.

Notes guest curator Mark Schwartz, president of the design firm Nesnadny + Schwartz: "All together, the photographs plot the neighborhoods, families, schools, gardens and waterways of a vast city to create a singular portrait. But they extend beyond the original project parameters to reveal the intelligence, patience and sheer achievement of making a good picture. The question, "What is Cleveland?" is addressed so poignantly, so richly, and so uniquely, I struggle to append more words to a body of work which, ultimately, says everything I could hope for."

"These photographic essays reflect a deep affection for and attentiveness to Cleveland's past, present and future," notes Tom E. Hinson, the museum's curator of photography. "Each artist brings a unique aesthetic vision and passion for photography to his or her chosen subject. The results are elegant expressions of the city that articulate Cleveland's significance to residents and visitors alike. We are delighted that The George Gund Foundation has chosen to pass these treasures on to the museum, where they will be appreciated by people from around the world."

Hinson adds: "In particular, two people deserve unbounded recognition for this project and their ambitious use of fine art photographers: the Foundation's retiring executive director David Bergholz, under whose visionary leadership the concept of commissioning photographers was encouraged to take wing, and Mark Schwartz, whose creative instincts and professional skill are apparent in every aspect of this venture."

Free public programs are planned to accompany the exhibition, including a symposium featuring many of the participating photographers, a lecture by celebrated photography historian John Szarkowski and gallery talks.

The 188-page catalogue (CMA, 2002, \$40) features 146 state-of-the-art photographic reproductions.

Mark Schwartz and Tom Hinson organized the exhibition. The exhibition, publication and public programs are supported by The George Gund Foundation in celebration of its 50th anniversary. The Cleveland Museum of Art receives operating support from the Ohio Arts Council.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is one of America's leading comprehensive museums. Its permanent collection is world renowned for its quality and breadth, spanning 5,000 years. The museum is a pivotal international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and art acquisitions. For more information on the museum, its holdings, programs, services and events, call 1-888-CMA-0033 or visit www.ClevelandArt.org.

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Artist Biographies (adapted from catalogue)

Dawoud Bey (born 1953, New York City) often builds his compositions from multiple images taken from slightly different perspectives and at slightly different times. He then groups the individual photographs together to create large, revealing portraits. By utilizing plain backgrounds, he concentrates on the sitters, capturing their personalities and interrelationships. He lives in Chicago.

Michael Book (born 1951, Colorado Springs, Colo.) considers landscape his favorite subject matter. He humorously explains, "For me it's the only thing I photograph, so it's not necessarily easier, it's what I'm drawn to. It's a much more cooperative venue because it doesn't move. You don't have to make arrangements, it's always there, always available." He lives in Baton Rouge, La.

Barbara Bosworth (born 1953, Cleveland) uses her camera to explore the landscape. Working in black and white, she studies the impact of human actions on the environment. Both concerned and ironic, her perceptive eye notes that the results may be harmonious or destructive. Bosworth's images are filled with personal and archetypal metaphors that address the continual cycles of life, death and renewal. She lives in Somerville, Mass.

Linda Butler (born 1947, Appleton, Wis.) has developed a photographic style that emphasizes form, space, structure, texture, pattern and the play of light. The printing process is a critical component to her work, through which she achieves the rich and subtle grays that distinguish her haunting images. She lives in Gates Mills, Ohio.

Lois Conner (born 1951, Rockville Center, N.Y.) has an interest "in the way that land retains the marks of the past and of the people who have lived on it." In 1982 she switched from an 8 x 10-inch view camera to a 7 x 17-inch banquet camera which, with its elongated rectangular format, enabled her to stress a long horizon line. Conner produces elaborately detailed negatives that she prints in platinum, giving each image distinctive qualities of light and atmosphere. She lives in New York City.

Gregory Conniff (born 1944, Jersey City, N.J.), a lawyer turned photographer, has, since 1978, traveled around the United States making straightforward black-and-white photographs of the landscape. Avoiding popular or picturesque sites, he has sought out locations that elucidate humanity's attachment to the land. He is especially interested in how people accommodate themselves to the places where they live and work. His explorations have taken him through such venues as his own back yard, Southern waterways, rust-belt industrial sites, the Upper Midwest and the arid northern Plains. He lives in Madison, Wis.

Larry Fink (born 1941, Brooklyn, N.Y.) is fascinated by life's rituals. He has photographed baptisms, birthdays, weddings, picnics, sporting events and even the world of fashion. Interested in people at all stages of life and all levels of society, he focuses on the character and personality of each individual. Fink has described his approach to documentary photography as "political, but not polemical." He lives in Martins Creek, Pa.

Lee Friedlander (born 1934, Aberdeen, Wash.), for more than 40 years, has documented what he describes as "the American social landscape and its conditions" in an understated and distanced manner, frequently enriched by irony and ambiguity. Since the late 1970s, Friedlander has been observing people working, intuitively responding to each environment with images that are full of visual detail and dramatic richness. He lives in New City, N.Y.

Frank Gohlke (born 1942, Wichita Falls, Texas), since the late 1960s, has relied on the American landscape for inspiration. Like many of his colleagues, he is not interested in recreating the majestic, unspoiled vista of an earlier time in the nation's history; instead, he records the land as it exists now,

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showing the intrusion of humanity into the natural environment. His broad, expansive views contain a profound sense of discovery and surprise. He lives in Southborough, Mass.

Douglas Lucak (born 1959, Cleveland) is best known for photographs of his native Cleveland. Although he began working with a panoramic camera, he has since relied on pinhole cameras he fashions himself. The small prints he creates evoke haunting feelings of abandonment and danger, often associated with the decaying urban environment. He frequently enhances the inherent moody and atmospheric qualities of his images by adding shades of toner. He lives in Cleveland.

Nicholas Nixon (born 1947, Detroit) rose to prominence as a chronicler of large cityscapes. Since the mid-1970s, however, he has produced distinctive, unflinchingly powerful portraits of an extraordinary range of subjects, from his wife and family to the elderly and the terminally ill. Nixon uses an 8 x 10-inch view camera, black-and-white film and contact prints to capture a visually complex, emotionally rich view of what it means to be human. He lives in Brookline, Mass.

Judith Joy Ross (born 1946, Hazleton, Pa.) has created a unique body of portraits using traditional photographic tools and subject matter. With her old-fashioned 8 x 10-inch view camera mounted on a tripod, she directly confronts her sitters, whether they are children or members of Congress. Ross has an uncanny ability to capture the humanity and vulnerability of her subjects. She lives in Bethlehem, Pa.

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Free Events Accompany
A City Seen: Photographs from The George Gund Foundation Collection

- Symposium:** **Saturday, Nov. 16, 2002, from 2 to 5:30 p.m.** in Gartner Auditorium, the symposium *Views of Cleveland: Dialogues in a City Seen* will feature many of the participating photographers. A book signing will follow.
- Lecture:** **Sunday, Nov. 17, at 3 p.m.** in Gartner Auditorium, **John Szarkowski** will present his lecture, *Photographing the City*, followed by a book signing.
- Lecture Series:** **Saturdays, Jan. 11, 18 and 25 at 10:30 a.m.** in the Lecture Hall or classroom D (Jan. 18), a *History of Photography Lecture Series* will include three one-hour slide lectures by CMA staff member Saundy Stemen exploring photography as a fine-art medium from the 19th century to the present and referencing CMA's expansive photography collection.
- Workshop:** **Sundays, Jan. 5, 12, 19 and 26 from 2 to 4:30 p.m.,** the hands-on Family Express workshop *Photo Fantasy* will reveal participants' perceptions of their community through photo-collage and other photo-based art projects.
- Gallery Talks:** **Wednesday, Jan. 8, at 6:30 p.m.,** by exhibition curators Mark Schwartz and Tom Hinson.
Nov. 24 and 27 at 1:30 p.m. and Nov. 30 at 10:30 a.m.; Dec. 8, 11 and 13 at 1:30 p.m.; and Jan. 4, 8 and 10 at 1:30 p.m., by CMA staff.
- Publication:** Renowned photography historian John Szarkowski, director emeritus of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is essayist for the 188-page hardbound catalogue of the entire collection (CMA, 2002, \$40), which has 146 state-of-the-art photographic reproductions.
- Public Information:** For more information about the CMA and its events, call **1-888-CMA-0033** or visit **www.ClevelandArt.org**.
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